



BRUCELLOSIS

What is BRUCELLOSIS?

Brucellosis is a bacterial disease transferred from animals to humans. The bacteria multiply in the reproductive organs and mammary glands. Infected animals are most contagious when they deliver or abort their young. Products expelled during the birthing process are highly infectious, such as the placenta. The disease is uncommon in the United States with an annual incidence of approximately 100 human cases. However, brucellosis is very common in underdeveloped countries. If aerosolized, brucellosis has the potential for use as an agent of bioterrorism.

Who gets brucellosis?

Anyone exposed to brucellosis can get it. Occupations at highest risk in the United States are veterinarians, cattle ranchers and slaughterhouse employees. Persons who consume unpasteurized milk and cheeses made with raw milk are also at risk. Brucellosis may be accidentally transmitted to humans by carelessly handling live virus animal vaccine.

How do humans get brucellosis?

Brucellosis is spread to humans through contact with blood, body tissues, or body fluids of infected animals. The most common method is consumption of unpasteurized milk and dairy products. Human infections may occur through breaks in the skin when handling infected animal tissues.

What animals may carry the disease?

There are several species of *Brucella* bacteria. Domestic animals that may be infected include cattle, sheep, goats, dogs and swine. Bison, elk, caribou, coyotes and some species of deer may become infected. *Brucella canis*, the species that may infect dogs and coyotes, is rarely transmitted to man.

What are the symptoms of brucellosis?

In humans, fever, night sweats, extreme fatigue, loss of appetite, weight loss, headache, and joint pain characterize the disease. The onset may be acute or insidious and the fever may be continuous, intermittent, or irregular. The disease may last for several days, months, or even a year or more if not adequately treated.

How long is the incubation period for brucellosis?

It can take from five to 60 days for an infected person to develop symptoms.

What is the treatment of brucellosis?

Treatment usually requires long-term antibiotic therapy. Some doctors may give two different antibiotics for six weeks. Relapses are common.

Can person-to-person transmission of brucellosis occur?

No evidence of person-to-person transmission exists.

How can brucellosis be prevented?

The federal and state agriculture departments working with farmers and ranchers have been highly successful in their eradication efforts in the United States. Do not buy dairy products from unlicensed retailers, street vendors, or other questionable sources. Foodborne transmission is the most common means of exposure. Many cases result from consuming cheese outside the United States. Persons traveling to Latin America, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Africa, India, and the Mediterranean are at increased risk of exposure. Avoid dairy products unless they were made from pasteurized milk.